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Edna St. Vincent Millay Correspondence

Edna St. Vincent Millay 1892-1950

Eugen Jan Boissevain 1880-1949

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Kathleen Millay 1896-1943

Norma L. Millay 1893-1986

See next page for additional authors

Creator(s)
Edna St. Vincent Millay 1892-1950, Eugen Jan Boissevain 1880-1949, Eugen Boissevain 1880-1949, Kathleen Millay 1896-1943, Norma L. Millay 1893-1986, George Hill Dillon, Mary Mettler, Marion Cobb Fuller, Henry Ernest Dunnack 1867-1938, Hilda McLeod, and Hilda McLeod Jacob

MILLAY, Edna St. Vincent

Born at Rockland, February 22, 1892.

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

From the Bookman, November, 1922.

THE LITERARY SPOTLIGHT

XIV: *EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY*

With a Caricature by William Gropper

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY is a slim young person with chestnut-brown hair shot with glints of bronze and copper, so that sometimes it seems auburn and sometimes golden; a slightly snub nose, and freckles; a child mouth; a cool, grave voice; and grey-green eyes.

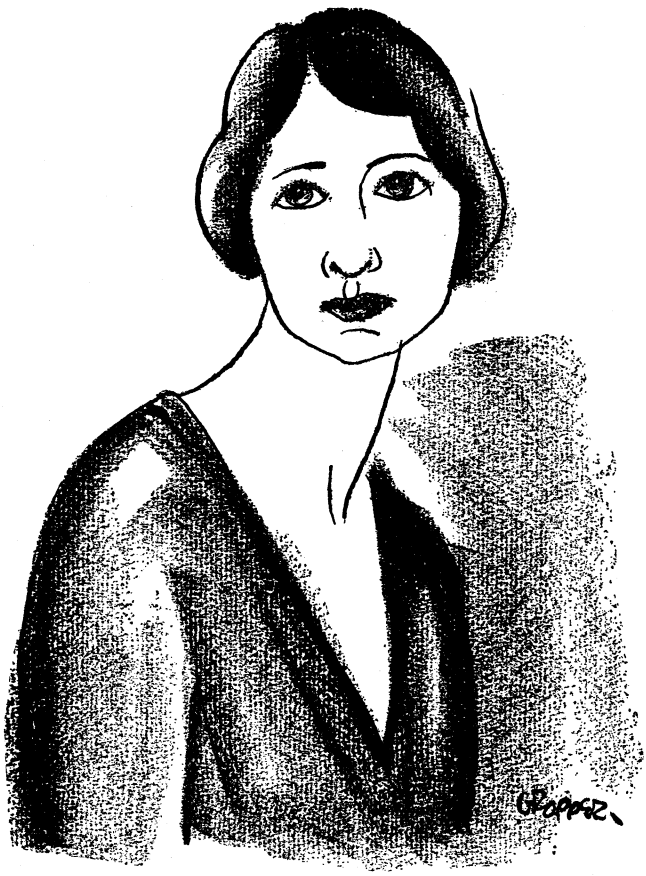
With these materials, she achieves a startling variety of appearances. When she is reading her poetry, she will seem to the awed spectator a fragile little girl with apple blossom face. When she is picnicking in the country she will be, with her snub nose, freckles, carroty hair, and boyish grin, an Irish "newsy". When she is meeting the bourgeoisie in its lairs, she is likely to be a highly artificial and very affected young lady with an exaggerated Vassar accent and abominably overdone manners. In the basement of the Brevoort, or in the Café de la Rotonde in Paris, or the Café Royal in London, she will appear a languid creature of a decadent civilization, looking wearily out of ambiguous eyes, and smiling faintly with her doll's mouth, exquisite and morbid. A New England nun; a chorus girl on a holiday; the Botticelli Venus of the Uffizi gallery. . . .

She is all of these and more. A contradictory young person! And the real Edna St. Vincent Millay, beneath all these disguises? That is hard to say. She does not give you any help by what she tells you of herself. Her speech is another series of disguises — of fictions, if you will. In the last few years there has grown up an Edna St. Vincent Millay legend, a sort of Byronic legend, which the younger generation is pleased to believe in. She accepts it; doubtless she is flattered by it — as any of us would be, the more flattered, the more untrue it was! — and perhaps she tries after a fashion to live up to it. She is certainly not the person to spoil a good story, especially if it is about herself, by prudish denials. As to that, she has a proud maxim: "I am that I am." Yes, she is what she is. Which leaves the matter where, doubtless, she prefers it to remain — in mystery.

The Edna St. Vincent Millay legend is based on her poems — or, to speak more exactly, upon one particular book of poems, the one entitled "A Few Figs from Thistles". Its title gives an indication of its cynical optimism. Previous to this volume she had been known as the author of "Renascence", and had gained the devout admiration of a few poetry lovers, but no popular audience. With the publication of "Figs from Thistles", she became the poet laureate of the younger generation. The first poem in the volume is as follows:

> My candle burns at both ends;
> It will not last the night;
> But ah, my foes, and oh, my friends —
> It gives a lovely light!

The second poem utters the same gospel of impulse:



Sketched by William Gropper

Edna St. Vincent Millay

Safe upon the solid rock the ugly houses
stand:
Come and see my shining palace built upon
the sand!

The younger generation is not excessively interested in literature as such; and in spite of its æsthetic pretenses, beauty of a high order can pass by without its acclaim. The postwar state of the young mind is individualistic and egocentric. If these boys and girls hail Edna St. Vincent Millay as their poet, it is because she seems to be writing about them. The postwar youth, who cherishes no illusions as to his own stability, honesty, or fidelity, is glad enough to find this comparison of himself with the tame old fashioned kind of lover:

Oh, Prue, she has a patient man,
And Joan a gentle lover,
And Agatha's Arth' is a hug-the-hearth, —
But my true love's a rover!

Mig, her man's as good as cheese
And honest as a briar,
Sue tells her love what he's thinking of, —
But my dear lad's a liar!
. . . . . .
Cold he slants his eyes about,
And few enough's his choice, —
Though he'd slip me clean for a nun, or a
queen,
Or a beggar with knots in her voice. . . .

Joan is paired with a putterer
That bastes and tastes and salts,
And Agatha's Arth' is a hug-the-hearth, —
But my true love is false!

The postwar mood of girlhood, the mood of freedom which was dramatized outwardly by bobbed hair and knee length skirts, finds itself pleasantly expressed in this volume:

And if I loved you Wednesday,
Well, what is that to you?
I do not love you Thursday —
So much is true.

It is a mood of freedom gaily maintained even in the midst of what might seem an emotional bondage:

Now it may be the flower for me
Is this beneath my nose;
How shall I tell, unless I smell
The Carthaginian rose?

Or, as it is more earnestly but not less gracefully put in another poem:

Oh, think not I am faithful to a vow!
Faithless am I save to love's self alone.
Were you not lovely I would leave you now:
After the feet of beauty fly my own.

This attitude toward life is summed up in the sonnet with which the volume apropriately ends:

If you entreat me with your loveliest lie,
I will protest you with my favorite vow.

Not every poet can have a legend. There must be something in his personality, as well as in his poetry, to stimulate the imaginations of his fellows and make them project their own wishes, sensationally, upon him. Yet it is not his fault; and it may be his misfortune. The Edna St. Vincent Millay legend has distracted attention from work of hers that is more beautiful and more deeply sincere. Some of these poems, just quoted, are after all a kind of *vers de société*, not less so because the society with whose emotions these poems politely and playfully deal is the bohemian society of fellow artists. Here are, truly enough rendered, the superficial emotions of a creative artist at odds with life and love, half fearful of some desperate and fatal trap, half proud of his escape. But this light laughter has a forced note in it, and this pride of escape is a regretful and at best a grim pride. Love is dealt with more honestly, even though cruelly, in another poem, the concluding sonnet of "Second April" — in which the poet repudiates with cold anger the lover's "mouth of clay, these mortal bones against my body set", and "all the

puny fever and frail sweat of human love".

In this fierce Manichæan denunciation of the body and the poor joys it has to offer, we find the real attitude that underlies these frivolities — and it is far from being a frank acceptance of the facts of life. It is not modern, it is something very ancient — an austere religious idealism, none the less austere and none the less a religion because it now has artists for its priests. It is a belief in something beyond this mortal life — the immortality, in this instance, of art. And it is not as a woman that the poet speaks here, but as a human being and a creative artist. Her mortal lover, with his dream of a warm earthly happiness to which she as woman must minister, is pushed aside. "You shall awake", he is told,

> from dreams of me, that at your side,
> So many nights, a lover and a bride,
> But stern in my soul's chastity, have lain,
> To walk the world forever, for my sake,
> And in each chamber find me gone again!

In a sense it is a rebellion against sex, and — since women are by social custom more the servants of their sex than men — against being a woman: a triumphant escape into an impersonal realm of art, which resembles heaven in that there is no marrying nor giving in marriage. Another woman poet, Anna Wickham, has expressed quaintly the same rebellion:

> I hide my breast in a workman's shirt,
> And hunt the perfect phrase.

But it is, as found in real life, not so austere a state of mind as might be imagined. In these feminist days it is not unusual to talk to a girl in forgetfulness of the fact that she belongs to the other half of the human race; but it is nevertheless not yet so commonplace that one does not feel a thrill to discover in a girl the capacity for such a broadly human relationship. Edna Millay is, eminently, such a person, the most delightful of companions — a gay and whimsical comrade, heartfree if not carefree, keen, generous, and braveminded.

The poetic scorn of mere human nature has its origin, of course, in the fact of the transiency of life. Life is pitiful because — as poets more than other people are given to reminding themselves — it comes inevitably to an end. "This flawless vital hand, this perfect head, this body of flame and steel" — shall die like any other: "it mattering not how beautiful you were."

Meanwhile, awaiting death, the poet has brave things to say: "the sands of such a life as mine run red and gold even to the ultimate sifting dust". . .

> In me no lenten wicks watch out the night;
> I am the booth where Folly holds her fair,
> Impious no less in ruin than in strength. . .

But still the thought of death recurs. Therefore —

> Suffer me to take your hand.
> Suffer me to cherish you
> Till the dawn is in the sky.
> Whether I be false or true,
> Death comes in a day or two.

And again, for a more sufficient solace against the thought of death, comes the hope of that immortality which art offers to those who serve her well:

> Ah, when the thawed winter splashes
> Over these chance dust and ashes,
> Weep not me, my friend!
>
> Me, by no means dead
> In that hour, but surely
> When this book, unread,
> Rots to earth obscurely,
> And no more to any breast,
> Close against the clamorous swelling
> Of the thing there is no telling,
> Are these pages pressed!

It is in such poems as these, in which the thought of death makes life more sweet, more beautiful, and more to be cherished moment by moment, that Edna Millay is at her best and loveliest. She has the gift of seeing things as though with her last living look. Her poem "Renascence" embodies the strange fantasy of one dying and coming alive again to look once more upon the earth. Another poem, "The Blue Flag in the Bog", relates a still stranger fantasy — the destruction of the earth, and of one sadly watching it burn, from heaven. "Now forevermore good-bye, all the gardens of the world!" In both poems it is a child who sees the beauty of earth so poignantly; and it is thus that Edna Millay sees it, always, with the eyes of a child — and thus that she salutes it, as one who is about to take leave of it forever.

All her early life was spent on the coast of Maine, and her young mind seems to have been filled with an infinity of impressions of the sea: "The sticky, salty sweetness of the strong wind and shattered spray"; "the loud sound and the soft sound of the big surf that breaks all day." She began to write poetry as a child, encouraged by her mother, who is a poet of real if unfulfilled talent, and a woman besides of vivid, humorous, and tolerant personality. But it wasn't of these familiar scenes that Edna as a child wrote; it was, as in a poem to be found in the files of "St. Nicholas", of "the road to romance"! It was only, perhaps, when she had trodden the road away from childhood that she looked back and found it so beautiful:

Always I climbed the wave at morning,
Shook the sand from my shoes at night,
That now am caught beneath great buildings,
Stricken with noise, confused with light.

It was the child who climbed the wave at morning, and not the adult wearied with city noise, who wrote "Renascence". That poem, comparable in its power and vision to "The Hound of Heaven", was written during her eighteenth and nineteenth years. It was submitted in a prize poem contest and published among other poems in "The Lyric Year", in 1912. It is now generally remembered as having won the prize; the fact is that it was passed over altogether in the awards.

This strange, lovely, mystical poem aroused in literary circles curious speculations as to its author, who was imagined as a child mystic. A poet, now better acquainted with her, wrote a solemnly congratulatory letter such as he might have written to young Christina Rossetti, or to Santa Teresa herself. He was much puzzled by the irrelevant and frivolous missive he received in return — dealing chiefly with the elated purchase of a pair of red dancing slippers. She was, it seemed, a real nineteen year old girl!

The year following she entered Vassar. She graduated in 1917 with an A.B. and a reputation for brilliant scholarship. She had written two plays at college and acted in them — "The Princess Marries the Page" and "Two Slatterns and a King". And now her first volume of poems was to appear.

The volume, "Renascence", included together with the title poem some quietly notable new ones. These showed no signs of influence by any of the jazzy contemporary movements in poetry; they were not cubistic nor post-impressionistic, they were not in free verse, nor intended to be chanted to revival tunes; the lines were chiseled, the rhythms classical — she was so old fashioned, even, as to write sonnets. The new poems contained nothing so

astonishing as "Renascence", but they showed a marked individual talent, and they maintained for her the respect of lovers of poetry.

She came from college, ambitiously, to New York, and settled in Greenwich Village, where rents were — in those days — low; in a very tiny room on Waverly Place, hardly large enough for a bed and a typewriter and some cups and saucers; a room, however, with the luxury of a fireplace, for which Joe the Italian brought, every few days, staggering up the stairs, a load of firewood at ten cents a precious stick. Here, on the floor, hugging the fire, she sat, remembering the coast of Maine: "the green piles groaning under the windy wooden piers"; "robins in the stubble", and "brown sheep upon the warm green hill" . . . remembering these, and making of such images poignant poems, only, as always happens with young poets, to get them back again from magazine editors who were "already overstocked with poetry".

A poet can, of course, live almost exclusively upon tea and coffee. But one must have cigarettes once in a while. Also, it is pleasant to have real cream, instead of condensed milk, in one's coffee. So, remembering her acting experience at Vassar, she went to the theatrical agencies, seeking a job. She was sent to the Provincetown Theatre on Macdougal Street, and acted in a number of comedies, and presently had some of her own plays put on. But the Provincetown Theatre, at that time, was very much an art-for-art's sake institution, paying neither actors' salaries nor authors' royalties. It was a happy moment when she was given a small "part" in one of the Theatre Guild productions, and a salary.

But there were no more "'parts", and no more salary; and meantime she lived on bread and coffee, or, for a change, bread and tea; except when, according to the happy bohemian custom of the Village, someone dropped into her tiny room on Waverly Place with a delicatessen dinner of pickles, olives, cold roast beef, potato salad, and, if he were a true friend, a bottle of cream — honest-to-God cream! — or on those other exceptional occasions when somebody had the money to pay for a dinner in the basement of the Brevoort.

When they dropped in, laden with packages from the delicatessen, or with the elate air of one who is going Brevoorting, they might find her crouched brooding on the floor of an unswept and disorderly room. She was not brooding over some shattered romance — for romances are always shattered, so why trouble about a thing like that? — but over a batch of manuscripts just come back from some magazine. . . . She *ought*, no doubt, to make use of her knowledge of shorthand and get a job as a stenographer; or even go to work at the ribbon counter of a department store. If people didn't want beautiful poetry why should she starve writing it? A fair question! . . . But to go to work, in that dull mechanical sense, would be a final surrender of her pride as a creator; it meant giving up being a poet. It would be spiritual suicide; and if it came to that, why accept the ignominy of doing drudgery for people who don't care for poetry? Why live in such a world at all?

On the other hand, why not? She had had no illusions about the world. It was an ugly and absurd place. She had never supposed otherwise, nor had any serious hope of its ever being made much better by her revolutionary friends. But, ugly and absurd as

it was, the poet could find beauty in it. That was what poets, apparently, were for — to squeeze this toad of a world with unflinching fingers until it gave up the jewel, of which — as all children who read fairy tales know — it is the venomous guardian! Perhaps she had better stick it out — which, upon further consideration, she decided to do.

In this tiny room might be seen, at times, her charming younger sisters, Norma, who had also come to New York, and Kathleen, on her vacation from Vassar — and sometimes the three of them could be persuaded to "harmonize" an old song of their own, Edna taking a throaty baritone:

> Oh, men! Men! Men!
> Oh, men alluring,
> Waste not your hour
> (Sweet hour!)
> In vain assuring.
> For love, though sweet,
> *(Oh, tho thweet!)*
> Is not enduring.
>
> **Ti-di-dee and ti-di-da!**
> **We must take you as you are,**
> **Etc.**

A pleasant scene to remember. . . .

Edna Millay's later career includes the publication of "Aria da Capo", a very remarkable play first presented by the Provincetown Players; "The Lamp and the Bell", which was the Vassar play for 1921; "A Few Figs from Thistles", already mentioned; and "Second April", in which her poetry has come to full bloom. "The Poet and His Book" is among the great lyrics of our language; and the volume contains, besides this poem, more than one that will go into the anthologies. In the meantime her work has happily found a wider recognition. She is at present in Europe, with her mother; she is finishing a fantastic prose romance, and — one learns with regret — is not anxious, in spite of the moth-eaten and rusty aspect of that part of the world, to return to her native land.

IN COVENTRY

By James J. Daly

MY friends, the leaves, who used to entertain me
On summer afternoons with idle chatter,
Are dropping off in ways that shock and pain me.
I wonder what's the matter.

My friends, the birds, are quietly withdrawing;
The meadow larks are gone from fence and stubble;
Even the crows are gone; I liked their cawing.
I wonder what's the trouble.

My friend, the sun, is here, but altered slightly;
He acts more coolly than he has been doing;
He seems more distant, and he smiles less brightly.
I wonder what is brewing.

C O P Y

November 12, 1929

Miss Edna St. Vincent Millay
c/o Harper Brothers
New York, N. Y.

My dear Miss Millay;-

"Poems for young people" is charming. I'm not a young person, but I have indulged in a copy of the book for myself and I do envy all the new poetry readers who will have the pleasure of reading your verse for the first time.

May we have a copy of the book for the Maine Author Collection about which you already know? I hope that you will autograph it for us, as you have done the other volumes, and will you add annote about the selection of the poems, whether you or the publishers or some other person chose them?

I am glad to have the dear little Sphinx verses, in book form.

Very truly yours,
MAINE STATE LIBRARY
By MCF

Please make your bill in duplicate to the Maine State Library.

Copy

March 16, 1931.

Harper an Brothers
49 East 33rd Street
New York, N. Y.

Gentlemen:

Please enter our order for one copy of Edna St. Vincent Millay's FATAL INTERVIEW; the twenty-five dollar, signed edition, on Arches hand-made paper.

Very truly yours

HED/mlh

State Librarian

March 23, 1931

Gentlemen:

Last week we ordered from you a copy of Edna St. Vincent Millay's FATAL INTERVIEW, the twenty-five dollar signed edition. Will you please write us what are our chances of getting this item?

Very truly yours

HED/mlh

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IN REPLY REFER TO.

March 20/31

Mr. H. E. Dunnack,

Maine State Library,

Augusta, Maine.

Dear Sir:

"Twice Required" was the first title announced for the new volume by Edna St. Vincent Millay. This title has since been changed to "Fatal Interview". We have ordered for you two copies of the trade edition, as directed.

Respectfully yours,

LORING SHORT AND HARMON

by C. E. Campbell.

The "Little Millay" Girl

When Edna St. Vincent Millay left Vassar College, some 15 years ago, she went to live in a dim little Greenwich Village garret, determined to write. In the garret there were only a bed, a table that began its career as a packing box, and a solitary chair. She was classically impecunious, but in her senior year at college she had written "Renascence," and so it was unthinkable that her future could be anything but writing.

Miss Millay is not the most prolific of contemporary poets. Four slim volumes were all that bore her name until recently, when book collectors rose to the discovery that they had best buy all the copies they could find of the first edition of her libretto for "The King's Henchmen," for which Deems Taylor wrote the music.

Like a Little Girl

The other evening Miss Millay read at Clark University in Worcester. This evening she will read in Hartford. In a day or two somewhere else. She comes upon the platform looking like a little girl dressed up in a trailing gown of Renaissance brocade. She stares out of wide eyes at her audience, scatters her books and and a large sheet of paper in a confused and toppling pile on the reading desk as a little girl scatters jackstraws that she may have the more adventurous time withdrawing what she wants.

She never explains her poems; sometimes she introduces them by some such polite, harmless fiction as "I shall read you four from 'A Very Little Sphinx'; they have each very good titles, but I have forgotten them, so I'll just read them." Or, "I shall try to say to you one about a bobolink; I have never said it to anyone, so I do not know if I can remember it," and the audience is intensely relieved as she does remember it perfectly.

Her fine feeling for her native State of Maine often occurs in her verse. In Camden in her early years she was known among the neighbors as "that wild little red-haired Millay girl." So when tales of her accomplishments first filtered back to her home neighborhood Maine rather sat back and folded its hands rigidly waiting cautiously to see what it was that the wild little red-haired girl had done now. Later on more than one of her own neighbors was to say, "Why, she's turned out all right; she not only a poet, she's a good poet."

Memories of Maine

She lives little in Maine now. Partly New York, partly Italy, and, for a while, when she was working on "The King's Henchmen," New Mexico. But what is there except memories of Maine in:

.....Always I climbed the wave at morning,
Shook the sand from my shoes at night.
That now am caught between great buildings,
Stricken with noise, confused with light.

Then, brushing back the red hair and kicking aside the long train of her dress-up gown she will tell you about the little girl who constantly fetched in flowers her mother whispered afterward were weeds, and of the little girl's hurt conclusion upon overhearing:

Must be purple's weeds
And pink and white posies.

The flavor of the theater comes out pungently when Miss Millay reads her own play, "Two Slatterns and a King":—which will take me about eight minutes, and I shall play all the parts, which are written in a galloping doggerel something like a fifteenth century morality play. So she commands people sitting on the platform to give her space, twitches a high backed chair into place and forthwith successively becomes the King, Tidy and her shrewish and untidy competitor.

And then when she had finished that, which, after all, requires not only sophistication but more knowledge of the theater than any little girl ever had, she gathers up her clutter of books, her large piece of paper, catches up the train of copper and gold brocade, smiles elfwise, and is gone.—Christian Science Monitor.

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

THE LAMP AND THE BELL

A Play in Five Acts

There be some things
That even the tortured heart's profoundest anguish
Cannot bring down from their high place.
Music is one of them.

This play in blank verse, with excellent included lyrics, was written for the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of the Vassar College Alumnæ Association, and differs from most memorial performances in having solid literary and dramatic merit. Appropriately, the theme is woman's friendship. The scene is in Shakespeare's Renaissance, and the mood and manner of the play is of Shakespeare's last period of tragic romance. Here, however, the imitation ends. Miss Millay has succeeded where so many writers have failed. She has written a Shakespearean play that is fresh and vigorous, with a humor that is her own and lines that are memorable in her own fashion. The characters also emerge and live as characters seldom do in Shakespearean revivals. In fact, the secret is badly kept; Miss Millay is more original that her medium, and her power of poetic creation breaks through the conventions of the *genre* she has chosen.

—*The Literary Review.*

"Elizabethan to the bottom yet not in the least derivative; it bubbles pure poetry."
—Mark Van Doren.

"She has written a Shakespearean play that is fresh and vigorous, with a humor that is her own and lines that are memorable in her own fashion. The characters also emerge and live as characters seldom do in Shakespearean revivals . . . 'The Lamp and the Bell' is an achievement."

—*The Dial.*

A FEW FIGS FROM THISTLES

Poems and Sonnets

Miss Millay has gifts which are not too common among poets: the sharp sense of *lacrimae rerum*, vehement love of saying exactly what she means, charming candor of utterance, and sudden piercing felicities. Those who know poetry by its thrill will not fail to recognize the real thing.

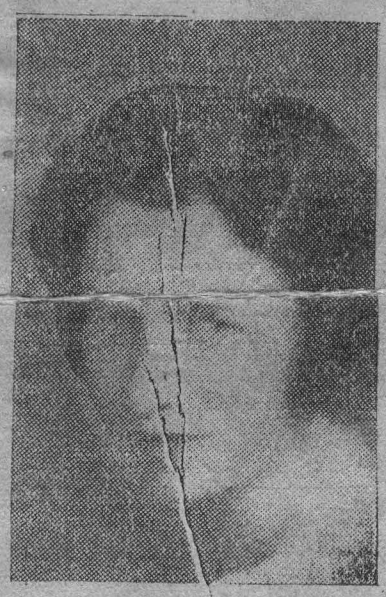
—Christopher Morley.

MORE BRILLIANT ACHIEVEMENTS OF TALENTED MAINE FAMILY

(Special to The Bangor Daily News)

BELFAST, Jan. 8—It was Norma, the middle child of the family who first hitched the wagon of the now famous Millays to a star, and while she is considered by many the most beautiful of the three sisters, she is the only one who has not sought a literary career, preferring the stage. Miss Norma, however, is one of her big sister's most exacting critics, and so considered by the poetess herself.

It was while they were living in obscurity in Camden that Miss Norma found an opportunity to interest some of the Summer residents in her sister, now the famous Edna St. Vincent Millay, who through their influence was sent to Vassar, and



EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY
Librettist of New Metropolitan Grand Opera.

the story of her rise in the literary world is well known.

Now when Miss Norma hitched her wagon to a star she little knew that it would become a kite with a long tail and that the whole family would be borne aloft. Nor did she expect to be benefited by it herself, her act was entirely unselfish but

KATHLEEN MILLAY
Whose First Novel Has Gone Into Second Edition.

it was a case of casting bread upon the water and from Miss Edna's first year in college the fortunes of the family changed. It was possible later on for Kathleen, the family baby, to attend Vassar also and then came the migration of the entire family which consisted of Mrs. Cora Buzzell Millay and the three daughters, to New York where for the most part they have lived in Greenwich Village, returning every Summer to Camden to many happy hours in the little cottage called The Tavern after a poem by that name dedicated to her mother by Edna St. Vincent Millay.

By the way, that most poetical name was not assumed with her success but was given her at birth, and who shall say that it was not a gift of the Gods, for who with such a name could resist the music?

The Millay kite now has four tails and is still going up. One of the latest to achieve fame is Miss Kathleen, now the wife of Howard Irving Young, the playwright, whose Not Herbert had a big run in New York all last year. Miss Kathleen like her sisters retains her maiden name in her profession, however, and is Kathleen Millay who is the author of Wayfarer, a novel of Greenwich Village and the Maine coast, which is now widely read and discussed. This is her first novel but no one can believe it as they read it, it sounds like on who has already arrived and her public is

NORMA MILLAY
Actress in Broadway Productions.

already clamoring for her next one on which she is now at work.

Never quite satisfied with what she has accomplished the indomitable Edna St. Vincent Millay, (in private life Mrs. Eugene Boissevain) is constantly at work and her most recent offering places her in a class by herself, for she now has the distinction of having written the libretto for the only American opera ever accepted by the Metropolitan and will have the pleasure of seeing it staged in February. It is called The King's Henchman, and for it Deems Taylor has written the music. Miss Millay has also made this into a drama, and she completed both in one year's time.

The third tail of the kite is Miss Norma, wife of Charles Ellis, well remembered for his splendid work in Desire Under the Elms, and now playing in, We Americans. Miss Norma has made a name for herself on Broadway, having been in a number of successes, as well as appearing many times in the Provincetown and other Greenwich Village theatres. Last Winter she appeared as hard-boiled New York society girl in her brother-in-law's play, Hot Herbert. She also has an excellent voice and has sang in Patience and other operas.

And as the Millay kite is borne aloft with that little wagon which Norma hitched to the star, 'way back in Camden a dozen or more years ago, it has carried not only her sisters and herself, but her mother also, for having brought up her family and seen them well launched on their careers, Cora Buzzell Millay has had time to do the thing she has always longed to do, write. This she is now doing and her poems of childhood are quite as remarkable in their way as the work of her now famous daughters. Not only has she written several hundred little poems, all about one little boy whom she calls her dream child, Little Otis, but she has made quite a reputation as a reader of poems. A little later they are to be published, probably syndicated in serial form, and then gathered into several little volumes. Those who have heard them are anxious for this to be done.

VOLUME 171 NOVEMBER 1935

Harpers Magazine

CONVERSATION AT MIDNIGHT

FOURTEEN POEMS

BY EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY

(*Note.* The following poems are selected from a sequence. As will be seen from the numbers which they bear, some of them are printed here in the order in which they appear in the sequence, while between certain others there are gaps of several poems. Since among the poems omitted are those which occur at the beginning of the group, the Editors have asked me to write this foreword, giving the reader some idea at the outset as to what "Conversation at Midnight" is about.

The time is the present; the place New York; the scene the drawing-room of Ricardo's house, an old house a few blocks north of Washington Square and just west of Fifth Avenue; it is the drawing-room of a wealthy bachelor of considerable culture, who has furnished his house to his own taste.

The men taking part in the "Conversation" have dined with Ricardo. Dinner is over; they are having their coffee and brandy, continuing discussions started at the dinner table, or bringing up new matters. Later they drink whisky and go on talking, with earnestness and enthusiasm, about all kinds of things; the conversation continues until morning.

The names of the characters have no meaning in themselves; they are just the names they happen to have; Pygmalion is a nickname. Ricardo is the son of an Italian petty nobleman and an American woman; his parents are dead, and he lives alone in the house which he has inherited from his mother. He is about forty. He was born in Italy, and in the same village lived Anselmo, an Italian boy somewhat older than he. Anselmo is now a priest. The two have been friends since they were children. Merton is an American, a stockbroker about sixty; he is very rich, very much interested in literature, and has a racing stable. John is a portrait-painter, financially not very successful. He envies Father Anselmo his faith and wishes he could share it; it is in answer to a troubled question from John that Anselmo has spoken about his religion somewhat earlier in the sequence, and speaks now again in the sonnet which opens the group printed here. Pygmalion is a successful short-story writer, gay and attractive, troubled about nothing. Carl

is a poet, and a Communist. He has written previously two volumes of poetry which both Ricardo and Merton consider very fine; Carl himself is no longer interested in them, and is impatient if they are talked about. Lucas is twenty-five and in the advertising business.

The "Conversation" does not end with the last poem printed here, but continues for some time. The party breaks up at about three in the morning and everybody goes home, nobody intoxicated, everybody in good temper. Nothing has happened, nothing has been established; they have had a stimulating evening discussing things which interest them and listening to discussion.—E. St. V. M.)

CONVERSATION AT MIDNIGHT

XVI

ANSELMO said, and took in his brown hands
Quietly the large ebony crucifix
That hung between his knees, "Knowledge expands,
And men grow canny; yet if they cannot mix
Science and Jesus, they leave Jesus out—
Though Science, like the ogre on the mat,
Turns into fog, snake, demon, leaves in doubt
His face forever; and Christ has not done that.

Out of such peace as can be troubled only
By your distress, I spoke; and I have erred.
You heard me through with deference; I saw plainly
You strove to get my drift—and got no word.
I am chagrined, like one who has defined
The colors of sunset to a friend born blind."

XVII

After a solemn pause, Anselmo said,
"I think I'll play some Bach if you can stand
My noise. Go right on talking, please"; and spread
Over the pedals of the concert grand
Ricardo could not play, but kept in tune
Always, in hope someone might call who could,
His broad black boots, twitched up his gown, and soon
Built Peace—from felt, wire, ivory, and wood.

Nobody talked, although I knew that some
Preferred to talk, were cowed into this hush;
Ricardo not—he cared not whence might come
This beauty, so it came; the mutinous flush
Of John said, Jesus had a champion there
Unjustly come by, tricky, not quite fair.

XVIII

"I want to talk," said Lucas, "about love!"
And gripped his hands until his knuckles gleamed.
He spoke in a loud voice, then did not move
Or make a sound for a long time it seemed.
Then suddenly he surged forward in his chair:
"I want to ask you what it is you do
When someone that you had just isn't there,
And never will be, when you know it's through.

I know, of course, that you forget in time
And feel the same as if you hadn't been
Ever in love, or almost so; but I'm
Asking you, what do you do all in between?
Of course, I've got my job and all of that,"
Said Lucas; "that's not what I'm getting at."

XXI

"Why, you never were alone in your life! You couldn't stand it
To be alone for a minute!" John said. "You'd howl your head off till you heard
Footsteps in the passage—Nurse coming with a light! Oh, I'll hand it
To you, you're fond of reading—books about Solitude preferred;
But you like to read them with your door wide open, and guest after guest
Grinning in with a glass in his hand and saying, 'How 'bout it,
Old Bookworm? What about being sociable and joining the rest
Of the boys in a little poison?'—well, did you ever close that door? I doubt it."

Merton was angry. He flushed, and a pretty mean look
Came into his eyes. He was a man who loved a story on himself, would worm it
Out of you, and laugh the gayest of all, but he'd brook
No levity on the subject of his being a lone-wolf and a hermit.
Two other convictions he had, you mightn't take a crack at, which
Were The Menace of the Jews, and The Over-Taxation of the Rich.

XXII

"This girl," said Lucas "—none of you know her name,
So I can say this—she was engaged, you see,
To another man when I first met her; she came
To visit my sisters and she played around with me
Of course, quite a lot; I was crazy about her right from the start,
But I wouldn't let myself go, because I knew
About this man, and I didn't want to get hurt
If I could help it; well, that all fell through.

One day she kissed me. And then—well, after that day
We were hardly apart for a minute, I couldn't bear her out of my sight;
I was sure she meant to marry me—though she never did say
She would, I remember now—well, the other night

She called me up: her family had made a fuss, she said,
And she was marrying this chap. I said, 'O.K., go ahead.'"

XXIII

"Lucas, Romantic Love is on the rocks,
Battered to kindling, flotsam on every shore,
Her sails as furled as are the Antioch's
Square sails," said Merton; "she will sail no more.
A gallant ship; but shipping in our day
Can't trust to winds to puff it where 'tis bid;
We can't go on rounding the Cape that way—
Where'd progress be, and coffee, if we did?

No man can tell what treasure in the teak
Of that exotic hold, a Spaniard's prize,
Went bubbling down, was questioned for a week
By dense myopic fish with lampy eyes;
Thank heaven, though, the old oil-burner's there
When I've a deal on and no time to spare."

XXIV

"That's not the point," Carl said; "the point is not
Whether you get your contract or get the air;
We're about as through with this thing called Love as—what?—
Plumes in our helmets, powder on our hair.
Love's lazy, won't keep step, is all the time
Swooning into a dozen lilies, or under a yew,
Or looking backward, and bursting into tears and rhyme;
Holds everything up, just can't fit in, won't do.

I've been in love myself—oh, yes, I have,
Don't worry!—but after what I've read and seen
I've got to be in the current; I'd sooner not live
Than be a spumy stick in a back-wash, if you see what I mean.
And the man who travels by the Bremen *and lies on her deck*
Longing for the old square-rigger gives me a pain in the neck."

XXVII

"Not that the world is so much with us," Merton
Remarked, "but such *a world! It seems to me*
It's getting noisier every day; I'm certain
'Tis more uncivil; men of low degree
In high positions—is there any hope
For culture, think you, when the grocer's son
Rides in his car, with judges and the Pope
To entertain him through the microphone?

Come, let us, like those gentlefolk of Florence
Who fled the pest in the Italian tale,
Absent us with some haste and much abhorrence
From these mephitic shores and, setting sail
For some green island, loll on delicate thrones
Till Doomsday, swapping yarns and skipping stones."

XXVIII

"Yes, pack your bags—I beg your pardon, let
Your valet pack your bags, and get the hell
Out of here, do! Work up a little sweat
Shaving yourself some day, you'll feel just swell.
Meantime there's Florence; and in a nasty state,
What with more plagues than one, what with the poor
Cleaning the privies of the rich—relate
That *jest in your Decameron, be sure.*

You don't like things the way they are; you'd like
A change. A change is coming; and it's near.
But not a change you'll relish; at least, you strike
Me *so.—The trouble with all you people here*
Is: two of you lie, two trifle, and the rest can't think.
Yes, I'll shut up. No, I don't want a drink."

XXIX

"Your masses," Merton said, "yes, yes, I know
It's not their fault; they've not been treated well—
Whatever the cause may be, their tastes are low,
Their conversation tedious, and they smell.
I hope they get their heaven, achieve their goal,
Have a good time, be free—but where's the hurt
If I, while loving a man's immortal soul,
Deplore his manners and dislike his dirt?

Why should you hate my guts because my pants
Are pressed, my coat fits, and my nails are clean?
Is not the idea: all *men should have the chance*
To bathe, et cet—*or just what* do *you mean?*
You don't add up. Or is it possible
You honor the dirt, and not the man at all?"

XXX

"It's true I honor the dirt; that's perfectly true,"
Carl answered, hastily lighting a cigarette,
And rising to his feet; "and so would you
If you'd seen such men as I have, with their sweat
Running like tears and making their chests all muddy,

Men second to none, I tell you!—well, it just looks queer
To me, clean finger-nails on a hand as bloody
As hell—that's why when I look at you I sneer.

Why does Anselmo honor that ugly thing
He wears around his neck?—I'll tell you why:
That's where the man he loves hung suffering
Till he can't tell the man from the cross. Well, neither can I.
I honor the dirt, if you like," Carl spoke from the door,
"Because it is the dress my mother wore."

XXXI

Over the sound of flushing water, which,
For some strange reason, science having gone so far,
Even in the houses of the extremely rich
Still roars in a room, and everybody knows where you are,
Pygmalion said, "Well, Merton, what do you think?
Has Swatter any chance?" "Race didn't fill,"
Merton replied; "say, can I have a drink
For God's sake?—no, mine's Bourbon.—It's just as well;

A mile's too short for him. Cloud Sweeper's running." "Who's up?"
"Bobby Jones." "Any odds?" "Ought to be." "Do any hurt
To put a little something on her nose?" "Well, this is no tip;
You do what you like. I'm going to bet my shirt."
Carl came back. "Who did the etching on the right?"
Somebody said, "Benson." Carl said, "Who's got a light?"

XXXII

"If you do not believe in God it is a good thing
To believe in Communism. There is much comfort,
As I observe, when lowering into an oblong hole a much prized object,
In the reflection that it is either (a) safe in the arms of Jesus, or (b)
Only a cog in a wheel and that the wheel continues to revolve and that that
is the important thing.

If you do not believe in God and cannot bring yourself
To believe in Communism, then, I may say, you are in a singularly
Unprotected position.
You have not so much as a last year's mullein-stalk to set your back against; all
winds blow upon you.

As for myself," said Ricardo, "I do not believe in God and I do not care for
The society of people.
I am willing to give them my coat, but I am not willing
To lend them my coat and have them wear it and return it.
I am willing to give them my loaf, but I am not willing
To sit and share it with them.

I do not wish to die, but I would rather die
Than have for my daily horizon year in year out—and sing Huzza! into the bargain—
The hairs on the backs of the necks of other people.

And I would rather stand with my back against an icy, unintelligible void
Than be steamed upon from behind by the honest breaths of many well-wishers."

XXXVI

In the Rotary Club and in the Communistic State there is no mourning
When Doctor Cog dies.
The place of Doctor Cog is immediately and automatically filled by Doctor Cog, and Doctor Cog and Doctor Cog
Are as alike as two cogs.

John said, "A man is tired of being a town all by himself.
He wants to be a grain of sand in a shovelful of sand in a cement-mixer
That is mixing cement to cement together the bricks in one of the walls
Of one of the buildings connected with one of the cement works
On the outskirts of a town."

Ricardo said, "Man has never been the same since God died.
He has taken it very hard. Why, you'd think it was only yesterday,
The way he takes it.
Not that he says much, but he laughs much louder than he used to,
And he can't bear to be left alone even for a minute, and he can't
Sit still.

You'd think he'd be glad to be able to decide things for himself
Just for once, have a good look at things and have a go at things
All by himself just for once, instead of never being able to turn around without asking for divine guidance, or take a step forward
Without leaning upon divine aid.
But it's not so. Man was ever so much happier before
His Father died.

He gets along pretty well as long as it's daylight; he works very hard,
And he amuses himself very hard with the many cunning amusements
This clever age affords.
But it's all no use; the moment it begins to get dark, as soon as it's night,
He goes out and howls over the grave of God.

It comes down to this: he wants to die too, he wants to be nothing.
And the next best thing to being nothing
Is being nobody."

YARDSTICKS AND BIRCH RODS

BY LELAND OLDS

Executive Secretary of the Power Authority of the State of New York

THE utility issue to-day is a phase of the major problem of government which this generation must solve. It reflects a crisis in which the supremacy of government over vested interests will be put to the test as surely as it was tested by the slave interests in the Civil War. And this issue is most clearly defined in terms of electric power.

The power issue has been precipitated upon the people of the country, not by the Roosevelt regime, nor even by the local prophets who pioneered in dealing with the problem of private power monopoly. It has been forced upon the country by the private power interests themselves who have gone to every length of open and secret manipulation of government to prevent the effective assertion of the public interest in power through the process of public service commission regulation.

The significance of this in terms of the authority of government is emphasized in a recent statement of Philip H. Gadsden, chief spokesman for the power industry in its fight against the Tennessee Valley Authority and the Holding Company Bill. In a debate with John T. Flynn, conducted in the pages of the *Forum,* Mr. Gadsden said, "A government which cannot regulate cannot govern." No political leader to-day can fail to meet that challenge, and the success of any leader will be judged in terms of his ability to reassert the supremacy of government in the field of electric power.

The new governmental policy which has resulted from this challenge is broadly directed at supplementing public service commission regulation with the force of actual or potential public competition as a means of enforcing the public interest in electric service. This new policy involves the building, where necessary, of public "yardstick" or "birch rod" electric plants to establish and enforce modern standards of electrical use.

The Tennessee Valley Authority in its declaration of policy has emphasized the necessity of distinguishing clearly between the private and the public interest in electric power. It asserts "that private and public interests in power are of a different kind and quality, and should not be confused, and that *the interest of the public in the widest possible use of power is superior to any private interest, with the result that, in case of conflict, the public interest must prevail.*"

The Roosevelt program faces squarely the fact that the private and public interests in power are in direct conflict. Orthodox economic doctrine holds that private monopoly operates on the theory of maximum profits and that the points of maximum profits and maximum production rarely coincide. But the government, with a primary concern for the living standards of its people, must be able to enforce its in-

EDNA ST. VINCNET MILLAY

(FROM MCCALL'S MAGAIZINE APRIL 1929)

EDNA ST. VINCENT MILLAY does not resemble the traditional conception of a poet. Rather, she looks like the sort of person about whom poems are written. She is slight as a child in figure—her shoulders are narrow and she is delicate looking. Her coloring is that of an autumn leaf. The freckles that cover her face and give it the tan of sunburn are of a leafy gold. Her cropped hair, billowing and lovely, is gold with red in it and her eyes are the odd mixture of green and yellow and brown that one finds in a leaf that is about to change color. Like an autumn leaf, it would seem that a sharp wrench or a stiff breeze would tear her from her stem.

Like most persons with a creative instinct, she is subject to temperament which sweeps over her in gusts—blowing sometimes high, sometimes low. There are times when life sings in her veins and she is almost childish in her movements, but sometimes she is sunk in depression like a cold, black mud.

She does not always seem so frail. Surrounded by friends and fun she is quick as a flame and as warm and alive. She has a ready wit, a sense of the ridiculous. Down in Greenwich Village her parties were the merriest and when she moved away the Bohemian spirit of the neighborhood departed with her. Even now in the big old white farmhouse atop a hill of the Berkshires, there are plenty of friends and lively talk and music.

There are those who wonder how anyone born so near the sea can be happy inland, far from the sound of waves slipping on rocks; and many of the poet's friends predict that she will tire of her present life in a few years. She was born in a town called Rockland in Maine on February 22, 1892, and her family three years later moved to Union, another town exactly like it. Her father was a school teacher, her mother a nurse. Vincent —her family called her that until the girls in college began calling her Edna—and her little sisters, Norma and Kathleen, lived the kind of life described in *Little Women*—firelit, friendly and imaginative.

VINCENT read everything she could put her hands on. A trunk in the attic was full of books and by the time she was nine she had read all of them—as long as she could get something to read it didn't make much difference what it was, she now admits. That the child would one day be called a genius no one dreamed. She herself was more interested in music than in writing.

Vincent's gift for verse began as a child, but it was little more precocious than that of other talented children. She must have been no more than seven when she handed her mother a poem painstakingly inscribed in large, childish letters. It was called "One Bird." It couldn't very well have been called anything else!

One bird on a tree,
One bird came to me
One bird on the ground
One bird hopping around
One bird flew away
One bird came to stay
One bird in his nest
One bird took a rest.

If Cora Millay was impressed by her child's ability she gave no signs of it. Neither did she say it was silly. She encouraged Vincent to write more, but at no time did she set herself to train a prodigy, and so Vincent continued to read and write and play the organ. At school she was ahead in reading, writing, but mathematics found her no better, no worse, than anybody else.

At an age when most girls would be graduating, Edna St. Vincent Millay was enrolled in Vassar—the college of her dreams. All her early reading had equipped her with a background that was amazingly wide and deep. She had a thirst for knowledge equaled only by her capacity for it. While in college she continued writing poetry, and wrote and took part in two plays—*Two Slatterns and a King* and *The Princess Marries the Page.* During her senior year her first book of poems was printed; *Renascence* was written and her importance as a poet was beginning to be felt.

After graduation Edna moved to Greenwich Village and occupied a hall bedroom on Ninth Street with her sister Norma. She found it no easy matter to earn a living by writing poetry and she and her sister became actresses in the Provincetown Playhouse, a theater on MacDougal Street that was once a stable and has the hardest benches in New York. There were giants in the Village in those days—literary giants whose names are significant today—Eugene O'Neill, Sherwood Anderson, Malcolm Cowley, Max Eastman, Floyd Dell, and they were her friends. Miss Millay wrote another play and many poems which by that time were meeting with greater success; and in 1920 her second book of poems was printed: *A Few Figs from Thistles.* The next year *Second April* appeared.

In 1922 Miss Millay was awarded the Pulitzer prize for the best volume of verse, and in 1923 became the wife of Eugen Jan Boissevain. He is a tall, sunburned man several years older than his wife. They have the same love of travel in strange places, of music, of books and the country. After their wedding they went to Europe and the Orient and on their return to this country they made their home in Austerlitz—a village hidden in the foothills of the Berkshires.

Once or twice a year they come to town, but they can hardly wait to get back. They have many and loyal friends. The living-room where they gather is unpretentious—as they like it—and the fireplace is bright and the view from the windows magnificent.

MISS MILLAY works in a barn that has been remodeled into a study. It is literally in the treetops. Her libretto to Deems Taylor's opera, *The King's Henchman,* was written there. She is a careful worker and her own scrupulous task-maker. There has been so much written about inspired poetry that one imagines a poem as springing into the artist's mind full born, equipped with lovely images and meter and pleasant-sounding rhymes. Edna Millay's poems come to her in a burst of what might be termed inspiration, but they are not full born. With careful craftsmanship she achieves a perfect unity with the line or two that "just came."

September 12, 1935

Edna St. Vincent Millay
c/o Harper & Brothers
49 East 33rd Street
New York City

Dear Miss Millay:

Glancing through your volumes which are in our Maine Author Collection, we noted with regret that a few, particularly your last volume, WINE FROM THESE GRAPES, are not autographed.

We hesitate to intrude upon your very busy life, but we hope you will realize the interest and value which autographs add to these books in our collection. They are for exhibit purposes only, and will afford an admirable source for authentic literary knowledge for future generations. For that reason especially do we wish to have each volume autographed.

May we have your permission to send WINE FROM THESE GRAPES to you for an autograph? We assure you that we will very much appreciate your graciousness in the matter.

Very truly yours

Maine State Library

hm

Secretary

CABLE ADDRESS "SAINTREGIS NEW YORK"

Hotel St. Regis.

Fifth Avenue and Fifty-fifth Street

New York

October 18, 1935

Miss Hilda McLead
Maine State Library
Augusta, Maine

Dear Miss McLead:

On our return from Europe Miss Millay found your letter of September 12. She asked me to say to you in reply that she will be very pleased to autograph a copy of her book, "Wine From These Grapes", for the Main State Library.

Kindly send the book to Steepletop, Austerlitz, N. Y.

Yours truly,

Eugene Saxton

October 22, 1935

Eugen Boissevain
Steepletop
Austerlitz, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Boissevain:

It is extremely kind of you to trouble with our request for Miss Millay's autograph, but we assure you we appreciate it. "Wine from these Grapes" is being sent to the above address, as you suggested, and we enclose a return label and postage for your convenience in returning the book.

Since you so graciously have permitted this book to be sent to Miss Millay, we wonder if it would be presuming too much on her generosity to send the fe others in our Collection which as yet do not bear the distinctive touch of her autograph. And may we, as each future volume is issued, send it to her for this purpose?

We realize our insistence, but hope it will be overlooked, in view of the importance and endurance of our Maine Author project.

Very truly yours
Maine State Library

hm

Secretary

Dear Mrs Upshaw,

I am returning you
herewith from the package sent
you yesterday autograph

If you will send
the other books, I will
gladly be pleased to autograph
them for the use that library.

Yours truly

Edgar Rice Burroughs

October 31, 1935

Eugen Boissevain
Steepletop
Austerlitz, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Boissevain:

In accordance with your generous permission, we are sending to you the following books:

Fatal Interview

Poems selected for young people, first edition

Poems selected for young people, second printing

The princess marries the page.

We are also sending Sung under the silver umbrella, in which the publishers have included two of Miss Millay's poems for children. We have been fortunate to secure the autographs of three writers, whose poems are also included, and we trust Miss Millay will be so kind as to add hers.

Your gracious cooperation is truly appreciated, as is that of Miss Millay, and we hasten to thank you for your present kindness in having our famous poetess autograph WINE FROM THESE GRAPES.

Very truly yours

Maine State Library

Secretary

hm
Enc:
Return label
Return postage

December 2, 1935

Eugen Boissevain
Steepletop
Austerlitz, N. Y.

Dear Mr. Boissevain:

The five books which we sent for Miss Millay's inscription have been received at the library.

Will you please express our most sincere thanks to Maine's illustrious poetess for her graciousness in adding this distinctive touch to her volumes. We appreciate her kindness and interest, and also the patience and courtesy which you have accorded our requests.

Very truly yours
Maine State Library

hm

Secretary

Translating Baudelaire

Into English Verse

Edna Millay and George Dillon Emerge

From an Almost Impossible Task With Rare Success

FLOWERS OF EVIL.
From the French of Charles Baudelaire.
By George Dillon and Edna St. Vincent Millay. With the Original Texts and an Introduction by Miss Millay . . . *321 pp.* . . . *New York: Harper and Brothers* . . . *$2.75.*

Reviewed by
BEN RAY REDMAN

THAT poetry cannot be translated with entire success from one language into another is a rule that is proved, from time to time, by such seemingly miraculous exceptions as Rossetti's rendering of Villon's ballade of lost ladies and Aubrey Beardsley's English version of the hundred-and-first song of Catullus. But miracles come as single spies, not in battalions, and the rule remains to plague any poet who, not content with inspired and isolated raids into foreign territory, attempts the assault, capture, translation, and transportation of a considerable alien poetic corpus. His success can never be complete, his prosodic feet will surely limp during weary stretches of the long campaign, he will return bearing marks of danger and disaster, and his train of prisoners will be marred by those whose wounds are often disfiguring and sometimes mortal. However, if his enterprise has been undertaken with true courage rather than foolhardiness, and with a full appreciation of its character; if he has brought technical skill, poetic experience, patience, ingenuity, and even genius, to the solution of his difficulties; and if his comparative defeats are even partially balanced by brilliant victories, he certainly deserves praise for his accomplishments rather than censure for his failures.

So let it be said at once that Miss Millay and Mr. Dillon deserve praise for the achievement that is embodied in the present handsome volume. Together, with an almost equal division of labor, they have translated seventy-two poems from Baudelaire's *"Fleurs du Mal,"* and Miss Millay's informed and well considered introduction makes it plain that they were perfectly aware how greatly they dared when they undertook their arduous task. Indeed, she anticipates almost everything that a reviewer might say regarding the problems natural to the translation of poetry, and, quite properly, she has laid particular stress upon the difficulties of translation from a tongue that is practically unaccented into one whose accents are its very pulse-beat. She has warned her readers, and Mr. Dillon's, that the translator must always (or almost always) be torn between the demands of letter and spirit, of sound and sense, in his double duty of fairly interpreting an existing French poem and of creating a new English poem. She reminds us that certain French words have no exact English equivalents, and that what may be said easily and briefly in the one language often requires awkward circumlocution in the other. She prepares us, even, for occasional adaptation in lieu of translation, and for frequent additions to and subtractions from the original.

But, despite this admirable and premonitory introduction, the worth of Miss Millay and Mr. Dillon, as translators, will be correctly appreciated only by readers who have tried to translate poetry for themselves; and the successes and failures of these two, as conveyors of Baudelaire's spirit into a foreign tongue, will be justly measured only by those who have long had much of Baudelaire's French by heart. Others, unacquainted with technical riddles, or with but a casual knowledge of the original, are likely to look for an unattainable, literal similarity when they first see the French and English texts confronting each other. All translators of poetry are harassed by devils, heaven knows, but Baudelaire's native genius is guarded by a crew of very special and provoking devils. His figures of speech, like his poetic visions, evade and flout convention. He spoke truly when he declared, *"J'aime avec fureur les choses ou le son se mêle à la lumière,"* and the mixed

images that were born of this passion, in an orgy of sensuous and sensual abandon, display an extraordinary resistance to translation. Nor is it easy to represent, in language other than his own, the startling excursions of a poet whose fancy was enamoured of *"la fête qu'assaissone et parfume le sang,"* and upon whose imagination the monstrous had a satanic hold. Fully to appreciate the strain put upon the translator of Baudelaire, one must realize the extent of his individual deviation from the norm of French poetry.

One usually asks of a translation: Is it a fair and faithful rendering? But, when a poet is translated by another poet who is distinguished in his own right, we may ask with equal pertinence: Does this translation measure up to the translator's original work? If it does not, then the translating poet has fallen victim to the stress and tension of his somewhat artificial task.

In the present case (to answer the second question first) it is plain that Miss Millay and Mr. Dillon have frequently been so victimized. They have added to their difficulties by attempting to make "English verse sound like French verse," and to that end they have tried to write English alexandrines, or iambic hexameters with a varying syllabic content. But English verse cannot be made to sound like French alexandrine verse, because the one is composed of unaccented lines, read with two rising inflections, while the other is composed of alternately stressed and unstressed long and short syllables; and, according to Miss Millay herself, the iambic hexameter has seldom been employed happily in English. Since the alexandrine is natural to French, and iambic pentameter is natural to English, it would perhaps have been wiser to let the one natural meter represent the other, if an effect upon English ears similar to the effect of the original upon French ears were desired. But Miss Millay and Mr. Dillon had the courage of their convictions, and they have paid the penalty in such verses as this one, which Miss Millay, surely, would never have composed for herself:

> It seems to me sometimes my blood is bubbling out
> As fountains do, in rhythmic sobs; I feel it spout
> And lapse; I hear it plainly; it makes a murmuring sound;
> But from what wound it wells, so far I have not found.

Examples even more unfortunate might be quoted; but it is pleasanter to dwell upon verses that are at once good English poems and satisfactory versions of Baudelaire. Among these are Miss Millay's translations of *"Le Crepuscule du Matin," "La Mort des Pauvres," "Les Hiboux," "Le Portrait," "Remords Posthume," "Reve Parisien;"* and Mr. Dillon's translations of *"Le Vin de l'Assassin," "Le Jet d'Eau," "La Voix,"* and *"Les Chats."* Miss Millay has brilliantly overcome many difficulties in her rendering of the long poem, *"Le Voyage,"* and Mr. Dillon has brought *"Lesbos"* into English with impressive success. *"Bien loin d'ici"* has lost none of its grace in translation, and *"Le Mort Joyeux"* none of its mortuary odor. *"Une Martyre,"* Englished as "Murdered Woman," displays unequal qualities in particular lines, but as a whole Miss Millay's version is triumphant.

Readers who seek English equivalents for some of Baudelaire's most famous lines will, of course, suffer occasional disappointment. It is hard to believe that the best possible translation of *"J'ai plue de souvenirs que si j'avais mille ans"* is

> I swear to you that if I lived a thousand years
> I could not be more crammed with dubious souvenirs.

And it seems that "Inspirer of youth, mistres beyond compare" is a curiously infelicitous rendering of *"Mère des souvenirs, maitresse des maitresses."* Nor do the lines, "Do you recall how I would love to lie for hours holding your feet?" convey the mood exquisitely expressed by *"Et tes pieds s'endormaient dans mes mains fraternelles." dans mes mains fraternelles."*

But it is by what Mr. Dillon and Miss Millay have done, rather than by what they have failed to do, that they must be judged; and the sum of their accomplishment, made possible by a sympathetic projection and lending of their own poetic powers, is a distinguished and valuable addition to the world's small stock of genuine, translated, poetry. In considerable measure, and this is high praise, their seventy-two poems make the reader, who knows no word of French, free of the strange, perverse, beautiful, horrible, fascinating, repulsive, experienced and imagined, world of Charles Baudelaire.

Edna St. Vincent Millay

George Dillon

NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE BOOKS,

SUNDAY, APRIL 5, 1936

January 29, 1936

Eugen Boissevain
Steepletop
Auterlitz, New York

Dear Mr. Boissevain:

May we offer our sincere congratulations to Miss Millay upon the forthcoming publication of her new book, FLOWERS OF EVIL.

We are of course eager to include this volume with Miss Millay's former works in the Maine Author Collection, and therefore have placed our order with Harpers for one copy, to be sent to Steepletop as soon as issued.

You have very kindly assisted us recently in having Maine's famous poetess autograph her books for us, and we trust that you will be so kind as to continue to help us in this respect.

We will very much appreciate it if Miss Millay will autograph the new book, FLOWERS OF EVIL, for the Maine Author Collection, upon its arrival. We enclose a label which may be used to return the book to us.

Very truly yours
Maine State Library

hm

Secretary

April 1, 1936

Eugen Boissevain
Steepletop
Austerlitz, New York

Dear Mr. Boissevain:

We have ordered two copies of the recently published FLOWERS OF EVIL: one for our general lending section, and one for the Maine Author Collection.

We have requested Harper to mail this second copy to you, and hope you will be so kind as to persuade Miss Millay to add her autograph to the volume, then forwarding it to us. We believe we enclosed a label for this purpose in an earlier letter.

We very much appreciate your assistance in this matter.

Very truly yours

Maine State Library

hm

Secretary

April 28, 1936

Eugen Boissevain
Steepletop
Austerlitz, New York

Dear Mr. Boissevain:

Some time ago Harper notified us that they had mailed to you a copy of the first edition of FLOWERS OF EVIL, Miss Millay's latest work.

We have a copy in our general lending section of the library, where it is proving very popular. The translations are skilfully interpreted, and it is indeed a rare honor to claim Miss Millay as a Maine poetess.

We trust that you will be so kind as to request Miss Millay to autograph the copy sent, forwarding it to us for inclusion in the Maine Author Collection. We are, as ever, deeply grateful for your assistance.

Very truly yours
Maine State Library

hm

Secretary

May 4, 1936

Eugen Boissevain
Steepletop
Austerlitz, New York

Dear Mr. Boissevain:

FLOWERS OF EVIL has been received, and is being placed with Miss Millay's other books in the Maine Author Collection.

Please extend to Miss Millay our sincere appreciation of her kindness, and our congratulations upon the expert and adroit contributions to literature that is FLOWERS OF EVIL.

Very truly yours

Maine State Library

hm

Secretary

August 14, 1937

Mr. Eugen Boissevain
Steepletop
Austerlitz, New York

Dear Mr. Boissevain:

You have so very kindly assisted us in the past, by asking Miss Millay to autograph her books for the Maine Author Collection, that we are asking if you will be so kind as to help us again.

We are requesting Harpers to send a copy of Miss Millay's newest book, CONVERSATION AT MIDNIGHT, to your address. Would Miss Millay autograph it for the Maine Author Collection? We enclose a return label and postage for your convenience in sending the book on to us.

A new volume by Miss Millay is always an event, and this we unhesitatingly believe to be one of her best. Already it is in great demand here, and we are anxious to have the Maine Author Collection copy. Please present our congratulations and best wishes to Miss Millay.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

SECRETARY

hm
Encl--2

Austerlitz, New York
August 23, 1937

Maine State Library
State House
Augusta, Maine

Dear Librarian:

At Miss Millay's request I am returning to you, under separate cover, your copy of CONVERSATION AT MIDNIGHT with her autograph.

Yours very truly

Mary D. Mettler

Secretary

August 26, 1937

Miss Edna St. Vincent Millay
Steepletop
Austerlitz, New York

Dear Miss Millay:

The copy of CONVERSATION AT MIDNIGHT, which you so graciously inscribed for the Maine Author Collection, has been received.

Please accept our sincere appreciation of your kindness in adding this distinctive touch to the book. The book itself is as the jacket says, "daring and provocative," but it is more than that: it is an umusual and unforgettable document of modern life and philosophy. We are proud that its creator is from Maine.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

hm SECRETARY

June 5, 1939

Miss Edna St. Vincent Millay
Steepletop
Austerlitz, New York

Dear Miss Millay:

Once again it becomes our privilege to add one of your books to the Maine Author Collection. It is a rare pleasure to claim the person who wrote the book, HUNTSMAN, WHAT QUARRY?, as a Maine poet, and we add our congratulations to the many which you are receiving.

We have requested the Personal Book Shop of Boston to send a copy of your book to you. May we hope that you will continue your courtesy and kindness by inscribing the volume, and returning it to us under the label and postage enclosed for your convenience.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

SECRETARY

hm
Encls.

STEEPLETOP
AUSTERLITZ, NEW YORK

June 13, 1939

Miss Hilda McLeod, Secretary
Maine State Library
Augusta, Maine

Dear Miss McLeod:

At the request of Miss Millay I am sending you under separate cover a copy of "HUNTSMAN, WHAT QUARRY?", which she signed for the Maine State Library.

Sincerely yours,

Eugen Boissevain

EB/hr

June 16, 1939

Mr. Eugen Boissevain
Steepletop
Austerlitz, New York

Dear Mr. Boissevain:

Thank you for so kindly sending to us the copy of HUNTSMAN, WHAT QUARRY?, which Miss Millay was gracious enough to inscribe for the Maine Author Collection.

The critics have admirably described the gifts and abilities of this noted daughter of Maine; and the qualities of her work have been so thoroughly praised that we can scarcely supply a new note.

We continue, however, to be extremely proud of Miss Millay and her volumes in the exhibit.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

SECRETARY

hm

August 17, 1940

Mr. Eugen Van Boissevain
Steepletop
Austerlitz, New York

Dear Mr. Boissevain:

Recently we purchased two copies of Miss Millay's moving poem, "There are no islands, any more." One we will use for lending purposes; the other we want to include with Miss Millay's other distinguished works in the Maine Author Collection.

For this reason, we are taking the liberty of mailing one copy to you, and trusting that you will continue you kindness to us in requesting Miss Millay to inscribe the little book. Enclosed are a return label and postage, and our appreciation for this courtesy will be great.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

SECRETARY

hmj
Encls--2

October 1, 1940

Miss Edna St. Vincent Millay
Steepletop
Austerlitz, New York

Dear Miss Millay:

Please accept our sincere thanks for your kindness in inscribing the Maine Author Collection copy of "There are no islands, any more."

It is with pride and appreciation of all that the lines represent, as well as of the spirit which prompted them, that we place it with your other works.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
By

hmj SECRETARY

February 15, 1941

Miss Edna St. Vincent Millay
Austerlitz
New York

Dear Miss Millay:

Under separate cover a copy of your stirring new book, MAKE BRIGHT THE ARROWS, is being sent to you. We have, of course, added this significant and beautiful volume to the lending section of our library; but the copy which will reach you is for inclusion in the Maine Author Collection. Will you be so kind as to inscribe it and return it? We enclose a label and postage for this purpose.

Please accept our congratulations upon the publication of such an outstanding and imperishable work.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

SECRETARY

hmj
Encls--2

February 28, 1941

Miss Edna St. Vincent Millay
400 East 52nd Street
New York, New York

Dear Miss Millay:

Thank you very much indeed for adding the distinction of your inscription to your book, MAKE BRIGHT THE ARROWS, for the Maine Author Collection.

We have been pleased to observe the favorable reaction of critics and publics to this volume, and to notice that the copy which we have in the lending section of the library is constantly borrowed by eager readers.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

hmj

SECRETARY

November 19, 1941

Miss Edna St. Vincent Millay
Steepletop
Austerlitz, New York

Dear Miss Millay:

It is always a joy to welcome another of your fine contributions to the literature of our state and country; and COLLECTED SONNETS, with its beautiful format and exceptional quality of work.

The copy which we purchased immediately upon publication for the Maine Author Collection is being sent to under separate cover. We trust that you will be kind enough to add an inscription to this volume and return it for the exhibit. The enclosed label and postage are for your convenience.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

hmj
Encls--2

SECRETARY

December 29, 1941

Miss Edna St. Vincent Millay
Steepletop
Austerlitz, New York

Dear Miss Millay:

The beautiful copy of COLLECTED SONNETS, which you have so graciously inscribed, is being placed with pride in the Maine Author Collection.

Please accept our gratitude for adding these pleasant words to your outstanding book. It is one which our patrons are finding so interesting that we are compiling a rather impressive waiting list.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

hmj

SECRETARY

October 26, 1942

Miss Edna St. Vincent Millay
Steepletop
Austerlitz, New York

Dear Miss Millay:

A copy of your moving poem, THE MURDER OF LIDICE, is being ordered, and we are asking Campbell's Book Store of Portland, Maine, to send you a copy. Will you be so kind as to inscribe this for the Maine Author Collection, and return it to us under the enclosed label.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

SECRETARY

hmj
Encl--1

December 4, 1942

Miss Edna St. Vincent Millay
Steepletop
Austerlitz, New York

Dear Miss Millay:

Thank you very much for the Thanksgiving inscription in the Maine Author Collection copy of THE MURDER OF LIDICE. We are glad to see that your poem is making a strong and favorable impression upon readers -- favorable, that is, in the sense that these things should be known widely. The striking and eloquent form in which you have presented the drama of Lidice is further testimony of your skill and further cause for pride by us in your work.

Very truly yours

MAINE STATE LIBRARY
BY

SECRETARY

hmj
Encl--3¢ postal refund

December 31, 1943

Miss Edna St. Vincent Millay
Steepletop
Austerlitz, New York

Dear Miss Millay:

You have been so kind about inscribing your volumes for the Maine Author Collection that we are happily assuming that you will continue.

We are, accordingly, asking Campbell's Book Store in Portland, Maine, to send you a copy of your new book. It is already in the lending section of our library -- seldom actually in, of course, because so many of our patrons are asking for it. The copy which will reach you, however, is for the collection; and we shall appreciate the added distinction of your inscription.

Sincerely yours

Secretary

hmj
Encl--return label
and postage

January 24, 1944

Miss Edna St. Vincent Millay
Steepletop
Austerlitz, New York

Dear Miss Millay:

Please accept our thanks for your kindness in adding the inscription to your new volume of lyrics, a fine and distinctive book which we are proud to add to the Maine Author Collection.

Sincerely yours

hmj

Secretary